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Mr. Kennedy's Bold Words Leave Some Disturbing Questions

THE ATTEMPTED INVASION of Cuba by counter-revolutionary forces has come, for the present at least, to a tragic and messy end. Our involvement in the ill-conceived, ill-timed and ill-planned fiasco was one of questionable policy and inept practice. The affair has ended without ennobling the cause of freedom, or strengthening the image of America as the leader of the free world.

This was the situation facing President Kennedy when he addressed a meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington Thursday. It was not a situation primarily of his making. Plans for the invasion had been drawn, and the inadequate machinery of invasion set in motion before he took office. The President must share, however, the responsibility for the policy inherent in our support of the invasion forces, as well as for the half-baked planning through which the Central Intelligence Agency sent the invaders to their bloody and futile task.

Yet the tone of the President's address was neither disconsolate nor apologetic. Incisively, and with a firmness that will not go unnoticed in the world, he sought to derive from the terrible experience some benefit for the United States and for the Western Hemisphere. The sincerity and the gravity of his warning that the United States would not permit the establishment in this hemisphere of a government we deem dangerous to our security was certain, of course, to attract the greatest attention, both here and abroad. But it would be a mistake to distort this statement out of its actual context, or to ignore the equally significant pledges to seek other means of insuring hemispheric agreement as well as Cuban freedom.

The Objective: A United Front

Though the President warned, and correctly, that our policy of nonintervention does not imply a refusal to protect our security, his warning should not be interpreted as a promise to "go it alone." On the contrary, his main effort was to stir the Latin nations to an awareness of their stake in Cuba, and to rally behind America's opposition to Communist infiltration of Cuba a united front of hemisphere nations. This does not portend any future military action on our part. It does not imply any deviation from our co-operation with and participation in the Organization of American States.

Nor did the President try to minimize the difficulty of finding ways to deal with the type of internal subversion that we have encountered in Cuba. He made it plain, however, that he had no present intention to intervene there with armed force, though he made it equally plain that we would not be deterred from action by cynical charges of aggression and intervention from nations in which aggression and intervention are demonstrated policy.

It was inevitable, however, that the charge of intervention would be raised, and it has been raised by friend and foe alike. The President took pains to emphasize that we had not intervened in the usually accepted sense of the word, and as Adlai Stevenson said, answering critics in the U.N., no sane man believes that the invasion would have failed had the U. S. actually intervened. But the inescapable fact—and a fact for which the President made no apology—is that we were involved, and whether our involvement assumes the proportions of actual intervention is a semantic exercise that will change the policies and opinions of few people.

Much of the criticism of U. S. action in the Cuban affair is cynical in the extreme. [illegible]

the President was quite right in declaring that we would not be frightened from our responsibilities by cries of intervention from men whose hands were still red with the blood of Budapest. Neither should we be too disturbed by the plaints of Mr. Nehru, who failed to protest Soviet intervention in Hungary, whose U. N. representative refused to complain when Russian tanks tore through Budapest, and who has demonstrated a myopic inability to discern any intervention in Laos by Chinese-based Russian-armed rebels. Though Mr. Nehru and his nation have profited greatly from America's resistance to Communist imperialism, he has been under hot domestic attack for being too friendly to the West, and his words now must be weighed with that in mind.

It is not the charges of these critics, however, but rather the possible implications of the President's words that must concern us. Specifically, the implication that we may abandon our policy of non-intervention in the event of sufficient provocation or threat to our security is deeply disturbing. It is only realistic to face the fact that we are not going to permit the subversion of a government, close to our borders, into a base for possible attack, any more than Khrushchev is going to permit establishment of a capitalist democracy in Hungary. But in stating or implying such a policy, we open the door to a host of dangerous interpretations of what constitutes sufficient provocation or actual threat to our security. And we come perilously close, with the same stroke, to negating our traditional policy that says that people have a right to whatever type of government they choose, whether we like it or not.

We come close, in fact, to a flat abandonment of our policy of non-intervention. The implications of such a step are too frightening to be lightly dismissed. And we trust that future statements of Mr. Kennedy will not only clarify his policy in this respect, but will underline again his belief, so well stated in his Thursday address, in the mutual security and respect embodied in our previous hemispheric policy.